

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

AT HOLDSWORTH SUSTAINABLE DESIGN



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao



HOLDSWORTH SUSTAINABLE DESIGN WAS FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT SUSTAINABILITY CAN BE AN INTRINSIC ELEMENT OF BEAUTIFUL AND EFFICIENT DESIGN.

Director Greg Holdsworth created the company's signature product, an eco-coffin, to provide something that solved environmental problems and was an icon, offering an opportunity for people to celebrate a life and honour the dead in a new way.

BREAKING THE COFFIN MOULD

Greg's vision was to produce a sustainable design that would look unique and break the mould of traditional coffins' shape, while creating something that was aesthetically pleasing.

"We're starting to see more sustainable coffins made from materials such as solid wood, wicker and cardboard, but they all follow a traditional design. I wanted to create something that looks strikingly different from the traditional coffin."

Greg has achieved his aim in the Return to Sender 'Artisan'. It has a sleek and elegant shape, with a stylish smooth finish. The wool lining provides a simple, but effective, complement to the natural woodgrain of the coffin. However, the Artisan is more than just a beautiful product.

The Artisan is made from minimal materials and weighs less than most coffins. There are no plastic handles or synthetic finishes. It is made from sustainably sourced plywood which has been hand-sanded and has a light natural oil finish.

The eco-coffin has also been designed to provide greater opportunity for friends and family to be with their loved ones during a viewing. Greg believes we're in an era when we no longer just mourn a death, we celebrate a life. His coffin has a unique design which, unlike a

conventional coffin, has low sides so the body is not hidden from view and people do not have to lean over the box and peer inside.



RETURN TO SENDER

"When I am working on a problem, I never think about beauty, but when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong."

RICHARD BUCKMINSTER FULLER





“The values in the coffin were a total mismatch to the values of the man inside it, whose passion was working with wood.”

GREG HOLDSWORTH

THE TOXIC SIDE OF TRADITIONAL COFFINS AND CREMATION

The seed of Greg's idea was planted when he noticed the artificial materials used in his father-in-law's coffin. He was surprised when he put his hand on the coffin's handle and discovered it was plastic. The coffin was made of artificial woodgrain over MDF (medium density fibreboard) and lined with synthetic material.

“The values in the coffin were a total mismatch to the values of the man inside it, whose passion was working with wood,” says Greg.

Traditional burials, cremations, funerals and coffins collectively have a range of negative environmental impacts.

In the United States over 80,000 kg of steel, in excess of two million kilograms of copper and bronze, and about 10 million board metres of hardwood go into the ground in coffins each year. Closer to home it's more about MDF and plastic — less waste of resources, perhaps, but far more toxic.

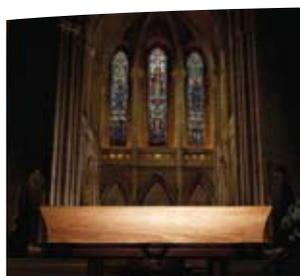
Most coffins used in New Zealand are made from MDF, a material that has traditionally contained high quantities of formaldehyde and other toxins. Formaldehyde is a carcinogen linked to nasal and lung cancer, and has been associated with asthma, nausea, and eye and throat irritation. Last year, 28,520

deaths occurred in New Zealand with an estimated 95 per cent of the people buried or cremated in MDF coffins; that's over a million kilograms of MDF and 15,000 kg of metal-plated plastic handles.

Minimising possible impacts of cremation is one of the goals for Greg's caskets.

“We look forward to seeing more of this design passing our way. As with any new designs and materials, we monitor them for burn time, thermal properties and discharge. The Return to Sender casket did very well on all fronts.”

Dean McNaughten, North Shore City Council.





“Viewing today at funerals is happening more and more, and the style of the Return to Sender casket lends itself very well for this option...”

WADE DOWNEY, DIL'S FUNERAL SERVICES

RETURN TO SENDER LEAVING NOTHING BEHIND

As the eco-coffin's name implies, the concept is about completing a circle of life, both from a life and death point of view, and from an environmental sustainability perspective.

Return to Sender coffin features:

- **lightness (minimal materials)**
- **non-toxic**
- **visually striking**
- **accessible**
- **simple**
- **meets industry needs**
- **unique New Zealand design.**

PLY — AN ICONIC KIWI MATERIAL

While researching materials, Greg settled on plywood as a material with a distinctive heritage in New Zealand, with uses ranging from beach-house construction to boats and furniture. Ply can be sourced from sustainably forested timber, has good working properties, and uses minimal quantities of glue. It is also an efficient way to use timber; one European furniture

maker claims that from a given number of trees they can make eight to ten times as much product from ply as they would be able to make from solid timber.

However, it has been challenging to find economical, high-quality plywood from sustainably grown sources, with a good price and consistent supply.

Greg uses sustainably grown radiata pine, meranti and poplar plywood from Italy. Greg would prefer to source more New Zealand materials, but his research has not yet found a supply that would meet his needs.

SUSTAINABLE COFFIN PRODUCTION

The eco-coffin stacks up well for sustainable production methods. Greg is conscious of keeping glue use to a minimum and supplements it with thin wire pins. The plywood itself contains some formaldehyde but the glue content of ply is a fraction of that in MDF. Greg says the formaldehyde issue is sometimes misleading. It is estimated that humans naturally produce about 50 gm of formaldehyde per day so the formaldehyde residue in an un-embalmed

body could be greater than that contained in the coffin.

The eco-coffin is also manufactured using minimal energy. The plywood sheets are cut into component shapes with a laser cutter and the parts are assembled and finished by hand.

Greg is constantly looking for ways to further lower his company's impacts on the environment, while maintaining economic viability.

FUNERAL INDUSTRY SUPPORT

Funeral directors are finding the sustainably designed Return to Sender Artisan an excellent alternative to offer clients. While funeral directors still consider it a niche market, they see it growing in popularity in an industry fast evolving to meet a greater range of needs and expectations.

“Viewing today at funerals is happening more and more, and the style of the Return to Sender casket lends itself very well for this option, allowing a person to ‘lie in state’ rather than lying in a casket. It adds more dimensions to the viewing experience.”

Wade Downey, Dil's Funeral Services

2007

designers institute
of new zealand
design awards

BEST

SILVER





“It has fresh ideas, very clever. I like how it clips together, and its usability. It is ahead of its time...”

CRAIG LITTLE, DAVIS FUNERAL SERVICES

Funeral directors find interest in the Artisan coming from some unexpected sources. While some might expect the non-traditional and environmentally sustainable design to be of more interest to a younger generation, Mark Graham of Graham Funeral Services operating in South Auckland had one family bury their 90-year-old grandmother in the eco-coffin.

Mark says there is also a demand for the product from farming families in the predominantly rural area he services.

“People want more choice today. This option is quite Kiwi. Some people really like the use of a wool-fleece lining, particularly for the New Zealand male as they don’t think the satin-type lining of traditional coffins is suitable. It is a good product for the Kiwi bloke.”

The Return to Sender Artisan is also promoted by prominent Auckland company, Davis Funeral Services. Funeral director, Craig Little likes the concept.

“It has fresh ideas, very clever. I like how it clips together, and its usability. It is ahead of its time, definitely niche. It attracts a lot of attention in the showroom. It is good to have an eye to the future regarding emissions at crematoriums and the use of natural materials.”

The cocoon-like shape of the Artisan stands out and is a real talking point with clients, say funeral directors. They are finding some customers buy it for how it looks, while others are interested in something that is good for the environment.

The distinctive design also appeals to families who wish the funeral and coffin to reflect the special qualities of those who have died. On one occasion the family of an architect considered it a perfect fit for him as he had created and appreciated great design. On another occasion, a young person had died, and the family found the Artisan, with its low sides and streamlined design, added something special to the ceremony. The lid provided the perfect canvas for personal messages from family and friends.

Further information can be found at www.returntosender.co.nz



 RETURN TO SENDER

sustainability
.govt.nz

Published in August 2008 by the
Ministry for the Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao
PO Box 10362, Wellington, New Zealand

INFO 309